

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Personal Interviews - Library Community**

The consultants conducted many interviews as a part of the evaluation process. Users of the Talking Book Library, the Library and Information Services Department (LISD), and the Natural Resource Information System (NRIS) were interviewed. A majority of MSL staff members participated in focus groups and most staff with supervisory responsibilities were interviewed individually. Reports on these interviews can be found at the end of the reports on those departments.

The consultants also interviewed most of the directors of the libraries that hosted focus group sessions and a number of other individuals whom the MSL staff had suggested as interview subjects. What follows here is a summary of the information gathered from the fourteen additional persons who were interviewed. They represent public, academic, and school library directors, former advisory council members, and a Montana resident who is a member of the National Commission Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS).

Library directors were asked about the impact of both statewide initiatives and LSTA grants awarded specifically to their institutions. Although Montana has not been highly active in offering individual "re-grants" in recent years, interviewees indicated that grants given in the past had been important to their libraries. The small total amount of LSTA aid received by Montana was mentioned by several and it was noted that there have been fewer and fewer individual grants since the emphasis has changed to technology (under LSTA). Still, extending technology through connectivity grants to the small, remote libraries is seen by most as being very important. The "Summer Institutes" for librarians have also been well received. The use of LSTA dollars to support the regional technology consultants appears to be the most popular program of all. A majority of those interviewed seemed to think that MSL is headed in the right direction and just needs to keep on with its current goals of getting more technology, technology support, and high-quality training to the libraries.

It was noted that funding for libraries in Montana is always an issue. Several suggested that initiatives to improve funding, both from the State of Montana and from local governments may be the next major issue that should be addressed by MSL. Demonstration projects, such as the LSTA-funded "Library Improvement Project for Madison County," were seen as one way, but perhaps not the only way to address funding concerns. The worry about funding, even to the point of questioning whether some libraries would continue to exist, seemed to be most acute in the eastern portion of the state. Several interviewees pointed out that their communities had experienced a decline in both population and tax-base in recent years.

Interviews with academic library directors revealed that the Montana State Library programs have relatively little impact on the larger academic libraries although it was mentioned that initiatives such as the statewide licensing program do help to save a few dollars. However, academic library directors said that the leadership at MSL has become

noticeably better in recent years. The general opinion seemed to be that MSL now has a better sense of the big picture than before and that the agency is considering and involving all types of libraries in its decision making.

The academic directors thought that MSL, especially LISD, may want to look at more ways of offering services at a distance, e.g., reaching state employees outside Helena with electronic resources. Some felt that the State Library also had a role to play in offering full-text databases directly to the general public. One person who expressed the opinion that the efforts of libraries in Montana are hampered by a lack of local funding said, "Perhaps MSL needs to look at statewide models like OhioNet (OH) and Galileo/Peachnet (GA) for models."

Overall, the State Library was seen as being very active and visible. One director said, "The Montana State Library has a good relationship with the academic community." This person went on to suggest that he would like to see his campus library become an active player in a statewide multi-type library network.

Representatives of school library/media centers indicated that there is a growing expectation on the part of school libraries that MSL can help them in some way. The school libraries seem to feel abandoned by the Office of Public Instruction and have responded positively to MSL's efforts to reach out to them. They see "Wired Montana" as a valuable source of information that they weren't getting in the past. School library staff are also appreciative of continuing education opportunities offered by the State Library. One of the interviewees suggested that OPI and MSL should work together to develop training resources such as web-based tutorials, video-taped workshops, and distance learning sessions for school library staff.

Many of the public library interviewees mentioned that the MSL has been very visible in recent years and praised the State Librarian for her communication skills and her willingness to listen to and consider all points of view. Even individuals who indicated some disagreement with specific decisions or policies characterized MSL's decision-making processes as being fair and open. There seemed to be wide acceptance that the State Library was diligently working to benefit library services in communities of all sizes and in every area of the state.

The Montana State Library was seen as an important provider of continuing education for librarians and other library staff. Both the Fall Workshops and the Summer Institute sessions were mentioned, but it was the Summer Institute format that was consistently singled out for praise. Several people did say that there should be more variety in the workshops MSL provides. One person said, "They seem to focus too much on technology when there are also needs in service areas and people oriented things." However, most felt that the emphasis on technology was appropriate and what was needed was the technology focus *plus* other offerings. One person commented, "The State Library has tried to do a lot and the State Librarian makes herself available; they just haven't gone far enough in developing the certification program and an associate degree so that librarians can upgrade themselves."

One director indicated his agreement and bemoaned the fact that poor library budgets make recruiting qualified staff in Montana extremely difficult. He said that his library sends staff to the Summer Institute and will continue to do so in the future. However, he continued "You're not going to train anybody in a week and none of the libraries in our area can afford anybody who is already trained."

Most of those interviewed agreed that the MSL focus is pretty much on small libraries. However, this focus was seen as appropriate even to the directors of larger libraries. Those interviewed from smaller libraries seemed a bit overwhelmed by the speed of change. "They're (MSL) pulling us along very fast."

A few directors bemoaned the dearth of competitive grant programs using LSTA funding; however, it was also noted that Montana's share of LSTA is rather meager. One public library director said, "Montana gets so little LSTA money that using it for little grants would fritter it away." He continued, "It's not really enough to have a major impact." "Give the money 100% to the MSL and let them fund statewide programs from that." Another director voiced support for cooperative licensing saying that most individual libraries in Montana aren't of interest to most vendors but that vendors do pay attention to a contract to provide databases to all libraries in Montana.

Several individuals indicated their strong support for the Talking Book Library's services. The services TBL offers were seen as being one that was most effectively handled on a statewide basis. A few people also mentioned that local libraries also have a role to play in serving persons with disabilities and two people pointed out that some libraries still do not fully comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act's guidelines.

Several interviewees expressed the opinion that higher LSTA funding was needed. They believed that the current funding of less than \$ 800,000 per year wasn't sufficient to have much impact given Montana's vast size and widely dispersed population. They said, "If there was more money, they (MSL) could support competitive, innovative grants." Another person said, "We're in a global economy... I see Montana as 900,000 people competing with the rest of the world." This person went on to say that his community couldn't compete alone and that aggregating resources on a statewide basis was Montana's only hope for keeping up. The state's involvement in negotiating database licenses and the OCLC fixed-cost contract were praised as examples of positioning Montana to compete with the world.

The Montana State Library was praised for the decision to deploy technology consultants around the state. One person commented, "The statewide technology program and putting people in the field are the right things to do." Another said, "It pleased me greatly that the Montana State Library stationed those people outside of Helena." Several people said that providing LSTA funding for the three state technology consultants has had more impact than any other recent development. One director commented "We finally have somebody close to work with—somebody who's actually been to your library!" Another

said, "Having the technology consultant available has increased the value of the other money that we've already spent on technology."

There was some disagreement regarding the relatively recent dissolution of the LSTA Advisory Council. Some felt that it made sense to dissolve the body since there were few individual grants to review. However a few others disagreed and expressed an opinion that doing away with the Council wasn't a good idea because MSL needs broad input. Nevertheless, virtually all the interviewees indicated that they had a high level of trust in the State Library and particularly in the State Librarian. One said, "The State Librarian provides good direction; she's focused." Another said, "The State Librarian is absolutely the best communicator, administrator, and process implementor I have ever known."

Some of the interviewees expressed concern over the Montana Library Network's goal of a statewide catalog. One individual said, "We don't need a statewide catalog to tell us that there aren't many resources in Montana." This person indicated that using state dollars to support interlibrary loan activity (specifically an interlibrary loan clerical position at the Billings library) would be meaningful to many small and medium-sized libraries. Another felt that the State Library didn't fully understand the relatively simple automation needs of small libraries. This person also worried that the cost of the OCLC fixed-price contract would eventually increase to the point where many libraries would find participation unaffordable.

MLN was, on the one hand, praised for being visionary, while, on the other hand, it was criticized for lacking in details. "We won't be joining the MLN shared catalog project; we're concerned about the loss of population and tax-base in our service area and we're afraid that we won't be able to sustain membership if we joined." One person expressed the worry that, "they haven't been able to tell us how much some of these things will cost in the long run." Nevertheless, some people declared their strong support for the shared catalog concept and urged continuing support for all aspects of the MLN program. One director commented wryly that "MSL does a beautiful job... we're really unfair to them... we whine and they respond and give it to us and then we cry uncle!"